Voters Must Weigh Bobby's 'Know-How'

By Drew Pearson
And Jack Anderson

Robert F. Kennedy is a man with a terrific Senate record, a lot of courage—sometimes bordering on gall—and a strong belief in the divine right of Kennedys. Though the 13 colonies discarded the divine right of kings 100 years before Bobby's Irish ancestors migrated to Boston, he still operates on the theory that the nearest relative should inherit the White House throne.

What the American voter will have to decide is whether he wants a President whose chief qualifications are brilliant ability—not always well directed—a lot of political know-how, access to a family fortune of $300 million, and the glamor of the Kennedy name. The voter will also have to decide whether Bobby has matured enough to profit from the mistakes of the past.

This judgment will have to be exercised particularly by liberal voters who tend to regard Bobby as their new knight in shining armor, but who regarded his late employer, Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin, as the embodiment of evil.

Bobby latched onto McCarthy's staff as a result of the fact that old Joe Kennedy early had contributed $50,000 to the Wisconsin Senator's witch-hunting campaign and helped in a conference with the late Cardinal Spellman to plot McCarthy's course. Old Joe, therefore, was in a position to ask that his son be put on McCarthy's payroll. He was.

McCarthy Exposed

Significantly, this was at a time when most mature citizens had reason to realize that McCarthy was a fake. He had been thoroughly exposed for defending the Nazi storm troopers who massacred unarmed prisoners at Malmedy in the Battle of the Bulge. He had challenged the patriotism of Gens. George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower. He had teamed up with anti-Semitic rabble-rouser Gerald L. K. Smith in an investigation of Anna Rosenberg. He had slandered dozens of loyal Americans without evidence. He had called the Democratic Party the "Party of Treason" and accused the Truman Administration of harboring 205 card-carrying Communists in the State Department.

Bobby Kennedy now wants to be head of the Democratic Party and receive the blessing of the Trumanites.

Sen. Kennedy's friends now argue that he was too young to pass judgment on Joe McCarthy, that he knows his mistake now that he has become a liberal. The truth is, however, that Bobby has never repudiated the demagogue from Wisconsin. When in July, 1953, every Senator walked off McCarthy's committee in protest over his methods, Bobby remained on his staff. He finally quit three weeks later because he couldn't get along with Roy Cohn, then general counsel.

Two years afterward, Bobby walked out of a banquet where he was being honored as one of the Nation's ten "Outstanding Young Men" because the main speaker, the late Edward R. Murrow, was critical of Joe McCarthy.

When McCarthy died in 1957, Kennedy not only attended the funeral in Washington but also flew to Appleton, Wis., for the interment.

Bobby's biggest investigation for McCarthy was into Allied trade with Communist China during the Korean war. Kennedy was outraged over the fact that the British, Greeks and other allies were shipping supplies to the Chinese for possible use against American troops in Korea.

Kennedy Switch

Yet when the same question came up 13 years later, Sen. Robert Kennedy voted against cutting off foreign aid to countries engaged in trade with North Vietnam. As the liberal lodestar, he was no longer indignant against shipments that might be used against American troops—in this case in Vietnam.

During his Communist-hunting days, Bobby also presented the case against Capt. Irving Peress, whose promotion to major gave the right wing a cause celebre. McCarthy had made Peress a national figure after Peress took the Fifth Amendment rather than answer questions about alleged Communist ties. From coast to coast, the right-wing claque cried: "Who promoted Peress?"

It was Bobby Kennedy who, at a Senate hearing, put the question to Peress which later reverberated around the Nation via the right wing.

The late President Kennedy has been criticized for not sounding off against McCarthy as did other Democratic Senators. In explanation JFK told James McGregor Burns: "I was rather in ill grace personally to be around hollering about what McCarthy had done in 1952 and 1951 when my brother had been on the staff in 1953. That is really the guts of the matter."

Perhaps this is why old Joe Kennedy bolstered up his third son. "He's a great kid. He hates the same way I do."

Has Sen. Kennedy now grown up enough to profit from the mistakes of the past? A future column will attempt to give the answer.

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